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The Townsend Library
of
National, State,
and Individual Civil War Records
at
Columbia University
New York City





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THE TOWNSEND LIBRARY OF NATIONAL STATE AND INDIVIDUAL CIVIL WAR RECORDS



THE
TOWNSEND LIBRARY
OF
NATIONAL, STATE,
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JUDGED

BY ITS CONTEMPORARIES.

(*For description of the work see page 12.*)

The Journal of Commerce.—“It is a work without parallel in the history of books, or in books of history.”

Hon. Benjamin D. Silliman.—“Your genius in recording the rebellion is equal to that of Grant in suppressing it.”

New York Daily Tribune, October 10, 1897.—“The completion of the ‘Townsend Library,’ as the great work known as ‘National, State and Individual Records’ is popularly called, is an incident of more than passing interest. It marks the culmination of nearly forty years of labor, and of the compiling, digesting and indexing of the greatest mass of historical narratives in existence pertaining to the National life of America from the outbreak of the Rebellion to the present day. That this monumental work has been secured for ever to New York, in the library of one of its great universities, through the munificence of one of its citizens, is cause for hearty public congratulation, while to the creator of the ‘Library,’ not only the city but the whole Nation owes a debt of gratitude that can never be discharged nor even adequately expressed.”

New York Herald.—“When these memorable words were uttered by Winthrop, ‘Would that some competent person would keep a careful record of events, for we are making history hand over hand’; he little imagined how stupendous was to be the amount of labor involved in keeping such a record. This has been so well done by Mr. Townsend that all who in future years desire information concerning an individual or an event in any way connected with or incidental to the Rebellion will be enabled to find it as easily as a merchant can find an entry in his accounts.”

The Evening Post.—“Here are materials for writing a history of the civil war more accurate and circumstantial than was ever written of any war that was ever waged.”

The Comte de Paris.—“It is a work of the greatest value, which seems to be above the strength of a single man and the limits of a single life.”

General Grant.—“I heartily indorse the sentiments of the Comte de Paris.”

S. Irenaeus Prime, editor of the New York Observer.—“It is a compilation that has no equal before or since the invention of the art of printing, and future ages will prize it as one of the chief memorials of the first century of American independence.”

The New York World.—“It is a subject in which posterity as well as the public of to-day is vitally interested.”

William Cullen Bryant.—“The compiling of a lexicon in any language is nothing to it. The forty academicians who compiled the Dictionary of the French Language had a far less laborious task.”

The New York Mail and Express.—“It is difficult to conceive that any private citizen could be found bold enough to undertake the task, and enthusiastic and brave enough to persevere amid extraordinary difficulties in forming such a Record, far surpassing anything of the kind that the British Museum, the Bibliothèque Imperial of Paris, or any other library in the world can ever possess.”

Governor Seymour of New York.—“It is a miracle of labor, arrangement and execution. It is not only necessary to the historian, but will be of great value in the event of war with other nations.”

The New York Times.—“It was long since recognized that a collection so exhaustive in scope and so valuable to history should have a permanent and public home, where students of history and writers of books might freely consult it.”

Dr. John G. Cogswell, The first Superintendant of the Astor Library.—“As a chronological and synchronous record of events, it is more minute and more authentic than could be formed in any other way.”

Mr. Schroeder, Superintendent of the Astor Library.—“As an evidence of ingenious conception and most laborious and praiseworthy de-

votion to a great undertaking, it commanded the loudest and most cordial approbation of all present."

The New York Tribune.—“It would be exceedingly unfortunate and discreditable if Mr. Townsend’s infinite labor should fail to be preserved where it would be permanently accessible to scholars and writers.”

Horace Greeley.—“Had I been acquainted with the nature and scope of the work before preparing my ‘History of the Rebellion,’ it might have saved me much time, labor and research.”

Hon. John A. Dix.—“Its value cannot be estimated in money.”

Rev. Henry W. Bellows, President of the U. S. Sanitary Commission.—“I do not believe that another man competent to this task could have been found in the country who would have given so many years of his life to this undertaking. It seems to be almost a providential felicity that such a curious and unique record exists.”

Hon. John Sherman. (On receipt from the author of a transcript of Gen. Sherman’s record).—“It is in itself a compendium of his military career. I feel that you will merit the grateful thanks of the family and kindred of General Sherman, which I sincerely tender you.”

The Press.—“Its immense value and importance have been testified to by every prominent citizen to whose attention it has been brought. The press of the city and country have universally commended it as a work of national importance.”

The Commercial Advertiser.—“It is a monument of preserving industry and of literary labor.”

The Christian at Work.—“Mr. Townsend certainly deserves well at the hands of the Republic for having prepared at his own cost a history of the war.”

Chief Justice Chase.—“I can add nothing in commendation of your work to what has been already said by others. It will be of the greatest value to the future historian.”

The Examiner.—“It would be a reproach to New York if it should be allowed to leave the city.”

The Citizen.—“There is nothing in the country that will compare with it as a general compendium of history relating to the decade from 1860 to 1870.”

Gen. J. Watts de Peyster.—“A personal examination enables me more fully to realize the magnitude and importance of your great work, embracing the history of the civil war in all its aspects and vast amplitude.”

The Evening Mail.—“It is a collection of historical records such as has never been made by the industry of any other man.”

Gen. Fitz John Porter.—“Its unique character and the impossibility of its having a rival in the world of literature, lend to it an historical value which the historian and student of history will appreciate. Mayor Low is entitled to great credit for his foresight in taking steps to secure for Columbia College this vast collection of historical material.”

The Evangelist.—“Certainly there would be general satisfaction among educated citizens of New York if the work should remain in Columbia College Library.”

Mr. J. C. Warner.—“The work concerns not only the State of New York but all the States, supplying a mass of well digested information concerning all sections of the Union that cannot be obtained in any other place.”

GEO. M. C. Meigs.—“It will be impossible to duplicate it, and it must remain the most complete and accurate journal of the events of the great struggle.”

The Home Journal.—“It is a marvel of labor and ingenuity and can never be duplicated.”

Gen. Scofield.—“It may well be considered of national importance.”

Gen. Nelson A. Miles.—“I congratulate you upon your magnificent work which will be of incalculable interest and value.”

Gen. O. O. Howard.—“I thank you heartily for the wonderful compendium you have sent me” (a transcript of his record). “It contains statements and knowledge which I supposed had passed into oblivion.”

The Cambridge (Mass.) Tribune.—“The acquisition of this remarkably and utterly unique work by the Harvard Library would add a treasure to our University that would be priceless in the future.”

Captain Doyle, Author of “Sherman’s March to the Sea”—“Your work should win for you the thanks and admiration not only of the

soldiers, but of every patriotic American. It is a stupendous undertaking."

Fernando Wood.—“No one can doubt the utility of your great work.”

Gen. Egbert L. Viele.—“I cannot but be struck with the vast amount of information and data that your annals must contain, if my comparatively unimportant services are so fully set forth.”

The Christian Advocate.—“It is, of course, in the Department of Ecclesiastic Information that clergymen will be most interested, and it is precisely here that the Library is particularly rich, enabling the reader to trace the relations of the Churches to those engaged on both sides in the contest, and the way in which the several denominations affected and were affected by the great struggle.”

Mr. Fisher A. Baker.—“I have received a synopsis of the Eighteenth Massachusetts Regiment. No one intending to prepare a history of any regiment can afford to neglect the vast body of information you have in your possession.”

Gen. N. P. Banks, (1870).—“The outline you send me of the Richmond letter is sufficient to answer my purpose. I am glad you have been able to find so clear a trace of it, for I began to think, so little was it known, that I might have been mistaken myself in regard to its contents.”

Senator Manderson, in the United States Senate.—“A case in point, showing the value of this work occurred in this very Session of Congress (1890), where it was deemed important in a matter that was in the Committee on Military Affairs to find a certain paper—a letter supposed to have been written during the years of the war by a prominent officer. It was a matter so important that search was made for it everywhere in public libraries, the Library of Congress, and the libraries of the great cities, and nowhere could a copy of the letter be found until it was finally furnished from the Townsend Library.”

The New York Herald, April 1, 1887.—“A retired army officer, of high rank, who had just been making some researches through the Townsend Library was seen by one of our reporters. He had endeavored to establish some important point of record which he had been unable to verify elsewhere. ‘Why,’ said he, ‘people have no idea what a marvelous fund of information there is in that work. All my interests are in the West, and I came East mainly to hunt through that work for

the fact I needed, and I found it. If I could only get it out West it would never come back, I can assure you.'"

The New York Herald.—"Such a work will lengthen the lives of the great men of the future by rendering unnecessary the immense waste of time which the want of ready and reliable information has hitherto imposed on historical writers."

"It ought never to be allowed to go out of New York, and yet, strange to say, it is a well known and public-spirited citizen of Brooklyn (Seth Low) who has been wise, earnest, and energetic in the endeavor to keep it here."

The New York Historical Society.—"Resolved, That the New York Historical Society acknowledge the services rendered to the cause of history by Mr. Thomas S. Townsend, in the foresight, skill and perseverance displayed by him in the preparation of his work."

The Long Island Historical Society.—"It is a monument of intelligence and patient industry, and its range and extent are wonderful."

The Union League Club.—"Resolved, That in our judgment it is a work of national importance and should be the nation's property."

General Wade Hampton.—"If your data about most of our public men are nearly as full as you have made mine, you have indeed collected a vast quantity of material."

General Beauregard.—"I desire to express my high estimation of the purpose, industry and perseverance with which, during so many years, you have carried on this extensive work."

Colonel Duncan K. McRae of the Confederate Army.—"Its fairness, impartiality and completeness cannot be too highly extolled."

Mr. Brock, Secretary of the Southern Historical Society.—"Not many men would have undertaken a work so provident as yours voluntarily and without stipulation of reward. In all that I have represented and by every evidence that I have given of a desire to be useful, would I express my commendation of your work."

C. T. Allen of the 20th Virginia Regiment (Confederate).—In answer to a letter from Mr. Allen, published in a Washington paper, soliciting information of the whereabouts of a sword—a valuable heirloom—captured at the battle of Rich Mountain, Mr. Townsend gave him the information desired, and the name of the soldier who captured it.

Mr. Allen says, in his letter of December 17, 1884: "Please accept my most grateful acknowledgments for the service you have rendered me."

Improvement in Recording the Transactions of the City Government.—Meeting held at the Society Library to consider the propriety of advocating the adoption of a similar method of preserving and concentrating the substance of the City Records so as to promote public convenience and aid in preventing abuses, by enabling the citizens at any time to learn all essential facts about the operations of public officers and the condition of municipal affairs in each branch of the City Government. After remarks by General Dix and others, the following resolution was unanimously adopted:

Resolved, "That in connection with the new city charter for the City of New York, it be, and is hereby respectfully submitted for public consideration, whether it would not be advisable to provide for the creation of a Recording Bureau where any fact connected with the operations of any branch of the City Government could be promptly ascertained—which Bureau should daily collect and concentrate faithful accounts of transactions in the various branches of the corporation business, rendering the City Records plain and intelligible as any merchant's well-kept account books, and thus preventing the possibility of such frauds (engendered in secrecy) as have lately disgraced this metropolis and plundered its treasury of millions of dollars."

A HISTORY OF THE LIBRARY.

BY J. HENRY HAGER.

An event of national importance occurred in November, 1860, when Thomas S. Townsend, the son of John R. Townsend, a prominent member of the New York bar and an honored graduate of Columbia College, began the compilation of the work known subsequently as "National, State and Individual Records of the Civil War." It was nearly six months before the firing on Fort Sumter that was "heard round the world", but Mr. Townsend proved his title to accurate observation and his keen insight into current events, by foreseeing the national calamity that was about to befall us—the storm soon to burst from the clouds already gathering. Thus was born, amid the discouragement of friends, the thinly-veiled sarcasm of acquaintances and the limitations of a very moderate income, what was to grow into the monumental historical work of the century.

Mr. Townsend, through a defect in hearing, was unsuited to face the activities of a professional, or commercial career, and thus found in his new employment an occupation congenial to him. When, later, he became impressed with its magnitude and its absorbing character, he accepted a position in the New York Custom House, which he held for a number of years, and which enabled him to devote his abundant leisure to his "*magnum opus*." Also was he cheered on by the words of the heroic Winthrop, who fell at the battle of Big Bethel, and whose dying aspiration for his country was that some competent person might keep careful record of passing events for the instruction of the ages to come.

Gradually the world became interested in the labors of this quiet worker. Such men as the Rev. S. Irenaeus Prime, Rev. Dr. Bellows, Gov. John A. Dix, William M. Evarts, and Generals Slocum, Fitz-John Porter, and others equally prominent, began to investigate and, as a result of their investigation, to wonder and admire. In 1867 the work was taken to Washington where, for a time, the prospect seemed bright for its purchase for the Congressional Library. The impeachment of President Johnson, however, intervened and put a stop to negotiations. As a result the then completed volumes were brought back to New York, and exhibited at the Union League Club and in the rooms of the Historical Society, the work, meantime, growing steadily in bulk and in value as the result of Mr. Townsend's patient industry and intelligent discrimination.

In 1890 another effort was made to secure the purchase of the collection by the nation, an effort warmly supported not only by Northern men of note in military and civil life, but by such ex-Confederates

as Gen. Joseph Wheeler and Gen. Wade Hampton. A bill authorizing its purchase was passed by the United States Senate, but was not called up in the House, at the last practicable moment, because the chairman of the Library Committee was piqued by a refusal of the Speaker to recognize him for any other purpose. In 1892 a similar bill failed of final passage, though also strongly advocated. Its acquirement for the Congressional Library was always strenuously urged by the Librarian, Mr. Spofford, but there was a chronic difficulty in getting certain legislators to understand the true nature and value of the work. In 1893 William M. Evarts, Senator Sherman, and Gens. Hawley, Slocom, and Fitz-John Porter headed a movement for the purchase of the collection by a popular subscription of \$50,000, the work to go to the American university receiving the largest number of votes. This undertaking was also abortive. Finally, the work having been placed in the library of Columbia College at the request of the trustees, with a view to its ultimate purchase, it was bought privately in May, 1896, by F. Augustus Schermerhorn, Esq., one of the trustees, and an arrangement made for the completion of the concluding volumes, and the preparation of the indexes, four in number, with a guide to the same. This work was finished in the Spring of 1898, and the creator of The Townsend Library had the pleasure of presenting the University with another volume in addition to those purchased by Mr. Schermerhorn.

At present the work is comprised in 90 volumes, larger in size than the ordinary bank ledger, containing 600 pages each, or 54,000 pages in all, which, with four columns of printed matter on a page, gives a grand total of 216,000 columns—these columns being as long as, and in some cases longer than, those of an ordinary newspaper. But the compilation of this immense amount of information regarding our Civil war, and other subjects connected with our national history, was only the beginning of Mr. Townsend's heroic labors. This crude mass of fact had to be carefully collated and epitomized in order to be of the slightest value to the historical student, or to the general reader. In order to meet this want, Mr. Townsend prepared a second work, which he called "The Encyclopedia," comprised of 30 volumes of 1,300 pages each, or 39,000 pages in all, in which reference is made to volume and page where every item mentioned in the main compilation is to be found. The toil involved in the carrying out of this second undertaking, it is difficult for one to realize who has not gone through it. In order to facilitate his labors, Mr. Townsend invented an original plan, something like the "journalling" of accounts in double-entry bookkeeping. The result has been most satisfactory, and, with the aid of the indexes, this great work is as easy of reference as a school history.

At the beginning of the first index are found references to the history of this country for a century up to 1860, covering Colonial and

Revolutionary times, the Declaration of Independence, the founders of the Union, the Monroe Doctrine, etc. Two pages and a half of references in the Encyclopedia are devoted to James Buchanan as individual and as President. Next come five pages and a half of references to the individual record of Abraham Lincoln, followed by eleven pages of references to him as Chief Magistrate. The latter installment is divided under headings as follows: The inauguration; his address; the inauguration ball; Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin; the cabinet; Mr. Lincoln and the executive department of the government; President Lincoln and military affairs; Gettysburg speech; the Emancipation Proclamation, and Mr. Lincoln's views on slavery; presidential campaign of 1864; peace and reconstruction. Seven pages of references follow, concerning the assassination of the President, the records of the conspirators, and their trial, making no less than twenty-three pages and a half of references to Lincoln alone. Fourteen pages of the index are given to Andrew Johnson. There are copious references to the departments of the government, including the War Department, its Secretaries, and the army from 1860 to 1870, and "all attainable information up to 1897." By consulting the indexes, and the guide to them, one can readily turn to the Encyclopedia and then to the work itself for such matters as regimental records, Union or Confederate; the various army corps, general officers, and naval officers on each side of the contending forces; all the States, the regimental and company officers, Northern and Southern, under the heading of their regiments, and those enrolled in a list of "Our Honored Dead, from military, naval, and civil life, April, 1861, to May, 1897."

In the preparation of this work, Mr. Townsend's aim was to catch the very "form and pressure" of the stirring times of which he treated, to photograph the wordy strife of the political discussions that preceded the war, the din of battle, the cheers of the victorious, the despair of the defeated, and amid all, the record of the daily life of the people both North and South during the struggle. But how was this done will be asked by the reader unacquainted with the method employed? There was only one way in which it could be done, and that was by the preservation of everything that was printed by the journals and magazines of the country during these four years. This collection was formed from day to day, as the events occurred, and not postponed until a subsequent period, when the valuable material might have been partially destroyed, or been unwittingly overlooked by the compiler. The originator of this novel method of recording history, did not, however, cease from his invaluable labors with the surrender of Lee, and the military close of the conflict; he continued his daily routine until 1870, recording with the same faithful persistence, everything printed on all subjects growing out of the war, so that the Library to-day furnishes historical students a complete account of the important five years of the reconstruction period. But this is not all;—during the past twenty-

nine years since 1870, a close watch has been kept upon the issues of the daily and periodical press, and no item even remotely relating to the topics discussed in the main body of the work, has been allowed to escape attention. Thus the Library has been growing steadily from year to year, and annually becoming more and more a priceless national inheritance! "Fifty years hence," said the late Hon. John A. Dix, "the work will have a value which cannot be estimated in money, as indeed it has now."

As to the historical treasures contained in The Townsend Library, they cannot, perhaps, be better summarized than in the words of a distinguished Senator on the floor of the Senate. He said: "Mr. President: This is a collection of all that is most valuable in the literature of the war, including every description of composition that related to the subject, commencing with the opening of the war and the causes which led up to it, all the way through—here is the great literary production of the war itself, it is what the American people wrote; it is the battle, the literary battle of the war itself, the great controversy embodied in the literature of the period. Now, it seems to me that what was produced of a literary nature, historical, novelistic if you please, the newspaper comments, the work of statesmen, the work of editors, and the entire mental activities of the American people upon both sides, as they were exhibited and were personified and crystallized in the period of the war itself, must be of exceeding value as long as we exist as a people and as long as history is of any consequence in this world. Now, here is the battle of Gettysburg, for instance," continued the Senator, "upon the exposition of which locality, we have expended already hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we are proposing in a bill which comes up a little later to make a large appropriation to depict upon that historic field the action of the Confederate army, the Confederate forces, during the three days of that tremendous and decisive conflict; and yet that was but one battle. Really what, after all, is the physical delineation of what can be reproduced of that great battle, compared with this picture, this truthful exhibition of all the mental collision that occurred during the war, and the literature in which it is embalmed, when we consider its real value as compared with what I have alluded to as being delineated for years upon the battlefield of Gettysburg alone; when we consider its real value, there is no comparison between them."





LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



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